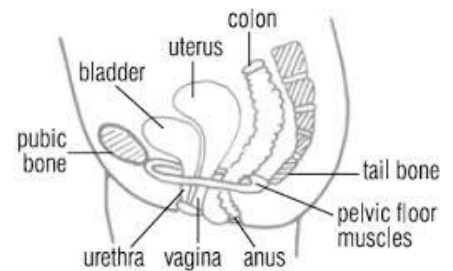


Pelvic Floor Exercise

Barwon Health Physiotherapy

What is the pelvic floor?

The pelvic floor is a group of muscles and ligaments which support the bladder, uterus and bowel. The openings from these organs, pass through the pelvic floor. The pelvic floor muscles attach to your pubic bone at the front and the tail bone at the back and form the base of your pelvis.



bladderbowel.gov.au

Strong pelvic floor muscles are important to:

- help prevent leaking of urine when you cough, sneeze, jump, run or laugh
- help prevent organ prolapse (a dropping of your pelvic organs)
- help you hold on when you need to go to the toilet
- improve your sexual enjoyment
- help control your bowel motions and wind

What causes pelvic floor muscle weakness?

Some of the common causes of pelvic floor muscle weakness are:

- childbirth – particularly following delivery of a large baby or prolonged pushing during delivery and use of forceps
- pregnancy
- being overweight
- constipation (excessive straining to empty your bowel)
- repetitive heavy lifting
- excessive coughing – causing repetitive straining
- changes in hormonal levels at menopause
- growing older

How do I strengthen my pelvic floor muscles?

It is recommended that all women exercise their pelvic floor muscles every day throughout life, to prevent weakness and improve strength. Exercising weak muscles regularly over a period of 3-6 months can strengthen them and make them work effectively again.

Exercising the pelvic floor after the birth:

The first two weeks after the birth:

- lie down on your back with your knees bent up or on your side
- gently squeeze and 'lift up' the pelvic floor muscles around your vagina and back passage so you feel as though you are closing these openings
- stop if you feel any pain
- hold the muscle tight for 1 to 2 seconds then slowly relax
- relax for 5 seconds, then repeat
- try to do 5-10 repetitions
- stop if your muscles feel tired
- repeat this exercise at least 3-4 times each day
- also try to tighten your pelvic floor when sneezing, coughing or lifting



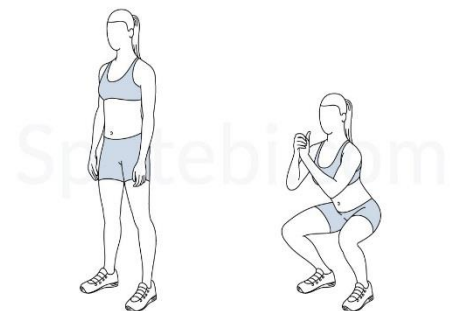
2-6 weeks after delivery:

- you will now feel more confident exercising your pelvic floor muscles and can begin to work harder with each exercise
- you can begin to exercise the pelvic floor while sitting or kneeling on your hands and knees
- squeeze and lift the muscles around your vagina and back passage as much as you can, you should feel the pelvic floor lift
- hold for 3 or more seconds then gently relax
- you should feel a definite 'letting go' of the muscles; relax for 5 seconds
- do 8-10 repetitions
- repeat this exercise 3-4 times a day
- gradually build up to holding for 10 seconds and 10 repetitions



6+ weeks:

- begin to exercise the pelvic floor in sitting, standing or squatting and with movement
- continue to do 3-4 times a day
- continue to tighten your pelvic floor when sneezing, coughing or lifting



During the Exercise you should:

- relax your thighs and buttocks
- keep breathing normally
- feel your muscles 'lift up'

What can I do to prevent damage?

Avoid:

- constipation and/or straining with a bowel motion
- persistent heavy lifting
- repetitive coughing and straining
- putting on too much weight

Do:

- make pelvic floor exercises a daily part of your life
- squeeze and lift the pelvic floor muscles before coughing/sneezing/lifting
- exercise regularly such as walking
- progress your pelvic floor exercises through changing positions ie sitting and standing

If you are unsure of whether you are exercising your pelvic floor muscles correctly or you are experiencing problems with your bladder or bowel, you should make an appointment with a women's health physiotherapist. To do this through the hospital, you will need a referral from your GP or midwife or visit the website cfaphysios.com.au.

Useful websites:

www.pelvicfloorfirst.com.au

www.continence.org.au

www.barwonhealth.org.au/maternity-services

